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ABSTRACT

A study explored the relationship between social/cultural control and the way knowledge is structured and presented in schools. "Critical literacy" was defined as the perception of meaning within the total context of the relevant experiences of the reader. The "dilemmas of schooling" language developed by A. Berlak and H. Berlak was used to characterize the ways the teachers in the study linked thought to action. Subjects, 10 children in two first grade classes, were observed for 10 months; they and their mothers were also interviewed before and after the school year. Although both classroom environments were nearly identical, strong differences surfaced in the teachers' patterns of control. Their actions transmitted two distinct views of reading to their students, with one teacher encouraging a decoding view of reading while the other encouraged critical literacy. The teachers also projected different messages about the relation of public to private knowledge and the importance of conformity or challenge to the status quo. Assumptions embedded in the basal reading program also transmitted cultural values to the students. The combination of the teachers' patterns of resolution and the curriculum of the school tended to distance the students from personal involvement with public knowledge and to reinforce conformity and obedience, making it unlikely that children would be able to achieve critical literacy in this setting. (JL)

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Literacy Acquisition and Knowledge Control in the First Grade

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This is a report of a study which has two primary concerns: 1) the relationship between schooling and the acquisition of literacy and 2) the implications of this relationship for cultural transmission. In this paper I address the second concern.[1] The focus of the study rests on the meanings ten children take from the experience of being taught to read in the first grade. The study is based on a series of classroom observations and conversations with the children, their parents and teachers over a ten month period in the two first grade classrooms of a public elementary school where both teachers use the same instructional program. I explore the impact of teachers' actions -- their daily classroom decisions regarding schooling and the teaching of reading -- on the meanings that accompany and are transmitted through reading instruction.

Although literacy as reading is central to the study, this is not a study of the effectiveness of reading instruction; of learning theory related to reading; nor is it an effort to study reading competence. Rather, it is concerned with what reading comes to mean to ten first grade children. A particular view of literacy is taken here, a "critical literacy" (Berlak & Berlak, 1981 , Bullock, 1975). More than the ability to decode the written word, critical literacy acknowledges learners as potentially active agents who relate their past and present life experience to what they read (Freire, 1974).

The study can be seen as an effort to relate curriculum theory to an exploration of the practice of reading instruction in a particular context. At the same time, it is a case study of cultural

transmission, that is, of how knowledge is transferred, reproduced and transformed. In selecting what to teach from what is valued as 'knowledge' our schools act as agents for our culture. What is selected, the way it is taught by teachers and received by learners influences continuity and change. In first grade children come into contact with the public knowledge of our culture (the curriculum). Here, they gather powerful impressions about what is valued as learning and whether or not it is to be received as a given or as open to question.

Rationale for the Study

When children enter first grade, they begin an extended period of compulsory education intended as basic preparation for adult life in the culture. The central part of this preparation is the acquisition and application of literacy. In the fifteen years I taught beginning readers, I was continually touched by the changes I saw in them as they were schooled, and by the part that learning to read played in these changes. Entering the first grade is perceived as a major event in the lives of the children of our culture. Here, the child is officially taught to read -- a first step toward acquiring the 'knowledge' our society sees as significant. This study evolved out of a continuing interest in the effects of schooling on children as they experience the process of being taught to read.

Many policy makers and researchers are presently defining literacy in terms of specific sub-skills that, taken together, comprise the process of reading. These skills are measured in terms of a competency standard applied to evaluate 'literacy'. Much of the criticism of schooling at this time is grounded in concern for declining test

scores (Harper & Kilarr, 1978). Although test scores may be raised as a result of current policy, the question remains whether the 'problem' of literacy is being solved by the raising of test scores, or if the 'cure' is contributing to the problem (Berlak & Berlak, 1981, Goodlad, 1979).

Since the skill of reading effects the whole range of learning experiences in school, the process by which this skill is acquired and the experience of learning it would appear to have basic consequences for the way children perceive what the intrinsic nature of knowledge and school learning is.

Reading as Critical Literacy

Over time, the word, "literacy" has become a catchall term. A report of a committee of inquiry appointed by the British government, A Language for Life (1975), is helpful in sorting out my use of the term as it relates to reading. The report defines reading three ways. The first, "A response to graphic signals in terms of the words they represent" (p. 79) is based on the committee's interpretation of Fries (1962) which views "the teaching of reading as largely a matter of developing the child's ability to respond to letters and spelling patterns." (p.79). The second, "A response to text in terms of the meaning the author intended to set down" (p.79) includes the first, that is, it builds on decoding by adding the component, meaning. The committee bases this definition on Goodman's (1968) view that reading requires a "reconstruction of the author's meaning." (p.79). Decoding and comprehending the author's intent are implicit in the third definition: "A response to the author's meanings in terms of all the relevant previous experience and present judgements of the reader." (p.80). Following Gray (1956) the committee sees this third concep-

tion of reading as ". . .more than a reconstruction of the author's meanings. It is the perception of those meanings within the total context of the relevant experiences of the reader." (p.79, the committee's emphasis). Reading as the third definition is the "Critical literacy" which I propose. It allows for the possibility of examining and exploring alternatives; of questioning what is read; of critique. A program for literacy which does not directly address the development of skills enabling the reader to read in this way, through this omission, establishes other priorities. In this sense, then, there are political differences between the first two conceptions of reading and the third. These differences hold implications for cultural transmission.

Theoretical Framework

Following Berlak and Berlak (1981), the study is based on a "Critical"[2] interpretation of Mead's social behaviorism. It focuses on the idea of the self as "reflexive" or self-interacting -- that we act accoring to how we perceive the world. The "inside" interpretations we place on our experience, both past and present, influence our "outside" actions. Mead's concept of the act assumes a unity of thought and action, rather than their distinction into separate entities. This view of behavior, then, is one of continuous transformation. In the everyday reality of classrooms, the relationship of student to teacher is an on-going process of negotiation. As teachers teach six year olds to read, their decisions to act in particular ways rather than others (whether or not they are consciously aware of it) evolve simultaneously from a thought-action base. The impact of these decisions over time can lead to particular meanings which influence children's perceptions of schooling and of literacy.

In this study the term, meaning is used as conceptualized by Geo. H. Mead and interpreted by Berlak and Berlak (1981).

> The central factor in adjustment of individuals to environment is 'meaning'. Meaning arises and lies within the field of the relation between the gesture of a given organism and the subsequent behavior of this organism. . .(Mead, 1934, pp 75-76).

For Mead "meaning is . . .a relation between certain phases of the social act; it is not an 'idea' as traditionally conceived." Meaning is ". . .not a process going on in the mind. . .it is an external, overt, physical or physiological process going on in the actual field of experience" (Mead, 1934, pp 76 & 79). As such, meaning can be observed. 'Meaning', then, is used here to mean the implications of an act or gesture taken by children as they are schooled. Meanings refer to the sense children come to make of reading and of the schooling process over time.

Method and Procedures

The approach used in this study is an outgrowth of what is generally known as 'interpretive' research (Schutz, Garfinkel, Goffman, Smith, L. M., Beittle, etc.), and what Brian Fay (1975) calls "critical social science". It acknowledges the connections between social theory and social practice. It is based on the idea that the observer interprets intentional action, that the action observed occurs within a given social context, that the actors share certain basic conceptions of meanings and that they act in terms of these meanings.

At a meeting in which the two first grade teachers and the principal agree to participate, procedure for the study is established. The number of children who are to take part as well as the frequency and duration of observations and interviews is established at this time. All parents of the fifty entering first grade children receive

a description of the study and an invitation to have their child participate. After a random selection from those responding, ten children become the primary subjects.

The data (both participant observation and taped, informal interview) is collected prior to the opening and following the closing of school as well as over the course of the school year.

The dilemmas of schooling language (Berlak and Berlak, 1981) is used as a descriptive and analytic tool. These terms connect patterns of resolution to consciousness, context or social structure, and to the acculturation process. The Berlaks take a Critical interpretation of Geo. H. Mead's social behaviorism, linking his conceptualization of the act to cultural transmission and change. Written in the form of sixteen dilemma statements, this "language of schooling acts" provides a way to order the complexity that characterizes the thought and action of teachers. Portraying the schooling process in terms of the exceptional as well as the dominant patterns of resolution provides a more complete analysis of the experience of school and its impact. It allows for a more realistic view of the seemingly contradictory actions of teachers which frequently manifest the continuous reflexivity of the school act. The dilemmas of schooling, then, take into account both the particular and the larger influences which together comprise the process of schooling.

[Insert list of dilemmas about here]

The control dilemmas depict pulls felt upon and within teachers concerning locus of control with regard to time, operations and realm of children's development. The societal dilemmas focus on issues of equality, of justice and relations between social groups. The

THE DILEMMAS OF SCHOOLING

The Control Dilemmas

Teacher v. Child Control (Time)
Teacher v. Child Control (Operations)
Teacher v. Child Control (Standards)
Whole Child v. Child as Student (Realm)

The Societal Dilemmas

Childhood Continuous v. Childhood Unique
Equal Allocation of Resources v. Differential Allocation
Equal Justice Under Law v. Ad Hoc Application of Rules
Common Culture v. Sub Group Consciousness

The Curriculum Dilemmas

Child as Person v. Child as Client
Personal Knowledge v. Public Knowledge
Knowledge as Content v. Knowledge as Process
Knowledge as Given v. Knowledge as Problematical
Intrinsic v. Extrinsic Motivation
Learning is Holistic v. Learning is Molecular
Each Child Unique v. Children Have Shared Characteristics
Learning is Social v. Learning is Individual

curricular dilemmas are concerned with the similarities and variations in how teachers treat knowledge and ways of knowing and learning.

Since reading instruction and its impact is the central focus of the study, the curriculum dilemmas, particularly the personal vs. private knowledge dilemma, take on a major role in the analysis, although all three areas of the dilemma language are considered.

Both participant observation and taped, informal interview were used to become familiar with the school world of the six year old. Interviews with the children and their mothers were conducted preceding and following the school year. Observations of children and teachers through the school day took place during the school year. Interviews with children, their teachers and the principal individually and in small groups were conducted through the year. In this way a composite image of the child's perspective of schooling and the experience of being taught to read was assembled.

The Setting

A public school located in a suburb of a mid-west metropolitan area is the site of the study. Constraints for learning to read appear to be at a minimum here, that is, it is an affluent community where home and school appear to share common educational goals. The well-maintained building with a modified "U" shaped floor plan and central courtyard is situated among privately owned, single family dwellings. For the most part, the people living in this area are college graduates with management-level business or professional careers.

The two first grade teachers are both highly regarded by the school and community. Each is in her mid-forties; has about fifteen

years of teaching experience; uses the same basal[3] reading program. They teach in classrooms which are virtually identical in size, room arrangement, resources and number of children. And yet, they present two distinct learning environments to their pupils.

Findings and Discussion

Although the two classroom settings appear nearly identical at the outset, strong differences surface based largely on the teachers' actions. Observations show strong similarities in their teaching practice. Still, the teachers' patterns of resolution to the dilemmas of schooling establish striking differences. Mrs. Reiss's dominant patterns of resolution indicate that, for the most part, she sees students as clients who she encourages to work fast to complete teacher assigned, individually carried out tasks. These tasks are presented primarily through a molecular and extrinsically motivated approach to unquestioned, public knowledge. Miss Orlette's dominant patterns of resolution indicate that, for the most part, she sees her students as persons who learn through a relatively less formal and frequently social approach. This approach reflects a relatively more holistic understanding of knowledge as it relates to personal experience. Both teachers' exceptional patterns of resolution display counter views which indicate opposing pulls operating within and upon them.

While both teachers exhibit a dominant teacher control pattern of resolution, Miss Orlette allows relatively more student autonomy and shows concern for a relatively broader span of realms of development than Mrs. Reiss whose typical focus is on the intellectual realm. Mrs. Reiss's dominant patterns indicate concern that work is completed and completed quickly. Miss Orlette's show more concern

with what and how work is done. Mrs. Reiss implements teacher control in largely a directly stated manner. Miss Orlette, on the other hand, makes relatively more use of indirect, implicit norms in implementing teacher control. Thus, they differ in kind as well as degree of control.

Observations and interviews reveal that while three of the children accept school, their teachers and the reading program with little discernible resistance, five children adapt, following resistant periods of varying length and intensity. The remaining two children resist throughout the school year.[4]

The data indicates that the children in both rooms who accept school as it is presented see school as a natural occurrence in which they experience a sense of success and satisfaction. Two of these who are in Mrs. Reiss's room appear to thrive on the concisely stated expectations of their teacher. Mrs. Orlette's accepting student appears to thrive on her more indirect and implicit approach. Two leave the school year as willing readers within the school setting, but do not choose to read at home. The third entered school an avid reader and continues to read with enjoyment in school or out.

The two resistant students (Victor and Karen) find school a continual frustration. In Mrs. Reiss's room, Victor, whose before school interviews indicated a self-confident child looking forward to reading at school and anywhere else, reports school and learning to read as a wasted effort. Although Victor demonstrates his ability to learn (he becomes one of the strongest readers in his room) and several peers signal him out as an example of someone who they consider "smart", he sees himself as inadequate and school as a place that reinforces his inadequacy. Karen, Miss Orlette's resistant

student, appears disinterested in school reading and learning in school, generally. This is also a departure from her before-school view of herself in school. Although she displays a vital interest in her own books read at home, she appears detached with regard to school reading. Karen is seen performing school tasks with little or no interest. She frequently appears remote displaying signs of anomie.

Of the five children who adapt to school, three are in Mrs. Reiss's room and two in Miss Orlette's. Once school is over, Mrs. Reiss's adapting children indicate a sense of relief to have shed the burden of adapting. Each expresses a dislike for school and school reading. They appear to have separated school knowledge from personal knowledge, accepting school as a place where you either abdicate to teacher control, or, as in one child's case (Zia),find some means to maintain autonomy while feigning acquiescence. The two children who adapt in Miss Orlette's room, on the other hand, do not display a dislike for school and school reading. Nor is there an indication of a burden dropped once school closes. Rather, each represents the year as satisfying, without mention of the separation of personal from public knowledge; autonomy from teacher control as seen in Mrs. Reiss's adapting children.

Analysis of the interviews and observations indicates strong differences in the children's experience of learning to read in these two classrooms. A composite definition of reading as seen by the children in each room was inferred from the data. In Mrs. Reiss's room:

> Reading is a teacher-determined task which: 1) needs to be completed within a given time period and 2) entails remembering what is read in order to repeat it for the teacher upon request.

and, in Miss Orlette's room:

> reading is a teacher-determined task which is done in order to: 1)understand the meaning of what is read and 2) share how it relates to personal experience.

One of the most telling indications of the impact of schooling, it seems to me, is seen in the way the children take on their teachers' definitions of reading. The children in Mrs. Reiss' room focus on remembering and repeating information for the teacher while the children in Miss Orlette's room see understanding and sharing reactions as the focus of reading. Neither teacher, however, sets out to convey the unintended meaning for reading conveyed: all the children see reading as a task, that is, as 'work' which is required of them. In all but two cases, the 'work' (required school reading assignments -- much of it is paper/pencil skill reinforcement) is regarded in a negative sense. This is a change from the before-school interviews which indicate an eager anticipation for reading at school by all ten children.

In the discussion which follows, I consider the children, their teachers and the basal reading program in relation to personal vs. public knowledge and its impact on conformity and challenge to the status quo.

The Children and Their Teachers. Through their actions each teacher establishes a learning climate which projects a message to her students regarding knowledge control. Patterns of resolution to the personal vs. public knowledge dilemma have particular relevance in regard to reading since the interplay of personal and public knowledge in reading represents what is described earlier in this paper as Critical literacy. While Mrs. Reiss tends to project the message that in school, personal knowledge has little, if any, relevance, Miss

Orlette accepts personal knowledge in situations where she sees that it is appropriate.

In both rooms the dominant teacher control pattern of resolution makes a statement regarding obedience to authority which helps mold the children's understanding of conformity and challenge to the status quo. While both teachers are clearly in control, Mrs. Reiss's control patterns indicate a direct authority; Miss Orlette's, a less direct authority.

In Mrs. Reiss's room, children come to see that conformity is not only expected, but rewarded, while non-conformity is penalized. This is illustrated in the following incident involving the number of basal readers the teacher requires of the class.

Unlike all the other children who must progress through each step of a prescribed sequence of basal readers, Mrs. Reiss allows Edward and Charlie to skip one basal reader and the workbooks which accompany it. This exception does not appear to be based on reading ability, since Edward is clearly not as capable a reader as Charlie. Also, there are other capable readers in the room, for example, Victor, who are not allowed to do so. In Victor's case, Mrs. Reiss not only expects what is generally required, but (as he reports and field notes indicate) she makes additional requirements of him in reading, since, she says, he is in the "fast group". Others in this group are not expected to do additional reading. Because Victor (and the others) see reading as a work assignment, they regard Mrs. Reiss's action as giving unfair advantage to Charlie and Edward. Edward and Charlie do have one trait in common, however. Each accepts Mrs. Reiss's dominant teacher control pattern and appears to thrive upon it. In this setting they present themselves as models of conformity. Victor,

on the other hand, strongly resists the routine instituted by the dominant teacher control pattern. Although capable of working at the expected rate, his distaste for the work slows him down, and therefore, he is often denied recess or participation in special events until he has completed it. When asked about this practice, Mrs. Reiss indicates that because Victor is in the fast group and because he "has such poor work habits" she is meeting his individual needs by giving him more practice in completing tasks more quickly. The unintended result of this is the class's knowledge that here it pays to conform.

In Miss Orlette's room, even though the dominant teacher control pattern manifests itself in a relatively less direct way, it serves to reinforce conformity and thus, to perpetuate the status quo. Most of her students are able to meet Miss Orlette's implicit, indirectly stated norms and learn to accept her authority, albiet benevolent. One exception is Karen who frequently appears detached. For example, she sits in the Nurse's office without permission and for no apparent reason, and goes to an unassigned classroom for Sustained Silent Reading period.[5] She offers no reason for these and similar incidents, saying only that she does understand where she is supposed to be. Perhaps Karen is displaying difficulty in dealing with her teacher's implicit norm expectations. Or, perhaps she is resisting conformity.

Distinctions can be drawn between the two first grade classrooms in regard to challenge to the status quo. Whereas in Miss Orlette's room two of the students participating in the study decide to challenge the status quo, none who are in Mrs. Reiss's do so. Early in the school year all six children in Mrs. Reiss's room express dis-

satisfaction with some form of the reading program, yet none will approach her to make their feelings known. When the possibility of talking to Mrs. Reiss about their concerns is suggested, their reactions range from a simple statement of disbelief that it would do any good, to a series of uneasy behaviors such as speaking in baby talk, claiming shyness, or slipping off a chair.[6] Clearly, they come to see that in Mrs. Reiss's room one does not challenge the way reading is presented.

In Miss Orlette's room, however, two children react differently. Steve and Kathie each express disappointment in being required to read the beginning pre-primer basal because each enters the first grade as a competent reader. They decide to act in their own behalf; to let the teacher know how they feel. Steve and Kathie find Miss Orlette willing to adjust the program to their expressed needs. A climate which permits risking dialogue with authority to challenge the status quo transmits a different set of messages concerning personal participation in society. Experiencing a positive reception to the challenge and, in this case, a positive resolution, establishes the possibility of empowered self-confidence and presents a model for the balance of the class.

Each of these classrooms holds the potential to both liberate and constrain. For half of the children (two in Mrs. Reiss's room and three in Miss Orlette's) first grade appears to have presented no serious difficulty in adjustment. Two children (one in Mrs. Reiss's room and one in Miss Orlette's) end the year with the view that reading is something to be done in school only. The remaining three (one in Mrs. Reiss's room and two in Miss Orlette's) begin the

first grade as capable, avid readers and leave first grade as capable, avid readers both at home as well as at school.

However, for the other half of the children, first grade presents constraints that change their before-school views of learning at school and of reading. Each sets aside some part of his/her earlier image of school: Bonnie, her hope of becoming a strong reader; Cassandra, her well established sense of autonomy and love of reading; Zia, her confidence as a reader and simple directness, and Karen and Victor, their sense of personal involvement in school. All five abdicate a previously stated unqualified love of reading. Except for Karen, they now read only when required to do so in school.

The Basal Reading Program. The basal reading program used in these first grade classrooms reflects a view of literacy which can be described by the first definition cited in the Bullock Report[7] -- one that concentrates on building decoding skills and excludes attention to the meaning of what is read in initial reading instruction.[8]

Embedded within the basal reading program are assumptions which hold implications for cultural transmission. One of these assumptions is that early reading differs from mature reading; that attention to the content of what is read may be postponed until one is "ready" -- until molecularized skills taught in hierarchical sequence are acquired. Another, holds that individual learning which is independently learned and executed is better than socialized, cooperative learning. Because the sequence of skills is arranged so that a pupil may progress independently, going at his/her own rate, it assumes that those who are capable would not be held back by the group. Although there are group lessons, they function more as a

convenience to the teacher than to instill cooperative learning. When a child (such as Bonnie in Mrs. Reiss's room) lags far behind the class, individual reading lessons separate her from her peers, and this, reports Bonnie, can be "lonesome".

Community values appear to be manifested in the selection and implementation of this basal reading program. From pamphlets and brochures distributed by the district board of education and the mayor's office as well as field notes, it is clear that the school community takes pride in its schools and the value of education. The community indicates the belief that education is the practical route to success, that individuals who work hard achieve independence, that civic participation is a responsibility.

Assumptions within the basal reading program support many of these values. For example, success, particularly highly visible achievement, which is prized in the community, can be readily seen in the number and level of workbooks completed and the number of skills that test scores display as "learned". One of the children, Zia, provides a comment that illustrates this point and shows an unintended result. She reports that although she is not as far along in the program as some (and thus, she says, "not as smart") she is not as far behind as some others ("the dumb kids who have to read alone with Mrs. Reiss"). Failure, then, as well as success, is readily seen.

An additional unintended learning related to the practicality of education stems from the reading program.-- children can learn that school knowledge is remote and/or meaningless and unrelated to their lives. The content of these beginning readers illustrates this.

For the most part, the content of the pre-primers and primers seem to defy most attempts to find meaning. Victor (the child in Mrs. Reiss's room who resists the program and school throughout the year) confides that he was confused by the nonsense words employed by the series. He knew words were to have meaning. Yet, these words seemed to have no meaning. Because he didn't know the meaning of these words and had difficulty remembering them when he needed to respond to the teacher's questions, he concluded that (quoting him) he "must be queer or dumb". This reading program and the way it was presented taught Victor to distrust the strongly felt self-confidence he displayed prior to the start of the first grade, and led him to the decision that because reading makes little sense it is of little practical value.

Also, it seems to me that the reading program represents a contradiction to the board of education goal of developing children to take part in American society which "by its nature demands competence and acceptance of civic responsibility on the part of individual citizens." (board of education brochure, 1981). If by "civic responsibility" the board is referring to individuals actively engaged in a participatory society, then, I suggest, children need to learn that one's personal experience of the world relates directly to public issues. Little or no attention is given to connecting personal knowledge to the content of text or to developing the view that school knowledge can be questioned in this early reading program. Because the program does not foster this paticipation, it does not foster "civic responsibility" as I see it. On the other hand, this program does prepare children fo itizenship if, by "civic responsi-

bility" the board of education means that we are able to accept what knowledgable others -- those who are "ready" to consider the content of text -- have prepared for us to read.

Conclusion

This case study of ten first grade children provides an illustration of the relationship between schooling and the acquisition of literacy and the implications of this relationship for cultural transmission.

The prime focus of first grade is to establish reading literacy. First grade children enter the compulsory education system with a view of knowledge based on their experience outside that system. The meanings they take from the process of being schooled and of being taught to read shape their developing views of knowledge and the uses of knowledge; of themselves as learners and as participants in society.

Acting as agents for the culture, schools control the extent to which personal knowledge may enter into public or school knowledge, that is, the curriculum, and thus, directly influence cultural continuity and change. Through curriculum selection, implementation and evaluation; through the schooling acts of teachers, schools reaffirm what the culture values as knowledge. Because literacy provides a powerful means for individuals to make a personal tie to society in general, a consideration of literacy acquisition holds implications for cultural transmission.

Over the course of the school year, these children come to see reading in school as an assigned task which is largely unrelated to their personal lives. The teachers' actions together with the basal reading program establish a separation of personal from public knowl-

edge. An effort to first establish fundamental decoding skills without attention to the meaning of what is read serves to reinforce this separation. The children learn that the meaning of text and its relation to life experience is secondary to these skills themselves. Also, it implies to the learner that he/she is not competent or qualified to address issues of meaning and should therefore leave such issues to those who are. When reading instruction does not address the development of fundamental skills that enable the reader to participate actively in what is read, that is, to relate meaning of text to life experience, other priorities are established. The messages which grow out of these 'other priorities', although frequently tacit, are clearly transmitted to the students. These messages distance them from personal involvement with public knowledge, reinforcing conformity and obedience. Thus, seeing reading as something remote from themselves establishes for the children, a passive view of learning and makes dim the prospect of achieving critical literacy in this setting.

Notes

1. An interim report of this study was presented at the 1981 AERA Convention in Los Angeles and is available from the author. Also, see the unpublished thesis, Literacy Acquisition, Schooling and Knowledge Control, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, 1982.

2. The use of the term, Critical here and throughout the paper derives from the work of critical theorists such as Jurgen Habermas of the Frankfort School and C. Wright Mills.

3. The basal reading program used by both teachers is Rasmussen, D. and Goldberg, L., Basic Reading, Science Research Associates, second edition, 1970.

4. For a more detailed account of the meanings the children take from the experience of being taught to read in the first grade see the interim report and or thesis referred to in note #1.

5. Sustained Silent Reading Period, a time set aside in the school day in which everyone is engaged in reading, is arranged here during the last twenty minutes of the day. Children are assigned in multi-age groups to classrooms throughout the school.

6. See note #1.

7. Supra p. 3

8. To quote the teacher's manual for Levels A and 1 of the Basic Reading basal program:

> The Basic Reading Series makes learning the skill of decoding the first task of the beginning reading pupil. This task can be greatly simplified -- and pupils thereby made more successful -- if it is kept independent of instruction in other language arts skills and if the process of decoding is learned inductively, or by discovery. . .Later stages of reading may have other objectives, but in the beginning it is only by enabling a child to associate spelling patterns with the sounds they represent that we can give him the tools with which to figure out words for himself and thereby achieve independence in reading.

The manual continues, in a section called, "Advice on Teaching Level A:

> Do not give the child context clues. . .After the child finishes reading a word or sentence, the context plays an important role; it helps him determine whether he has read the sentence accurately.

> . . .Keep your comments on the story content brief. . . .Remember that lengthy discussion slows up the lesson, and questions about meaning suggest that you doubt the child's ability to understand. By maintaing a brisk pace that focuses on decoding the words accurately, you will provide an atmosphere of constant progress and success. . . When trying to help a child with decoding, the teacher should never ask questions such as "What makes sense here?. . . That leads to guessing, usually inaccurate guessing.

Clearly, the aim of the program at this level is to decode printed text and to avoid the meaning of what the author might be saying.

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Abstract

Literacy Acquisition and Knowledge Control in the First Grade

by Rita Roth

This study explores the relationship between social/cultural control and the way knowledge is structured and presented in schools. It considers the implications of this relationship for cultural transmission or change through a study of the meanings ten children take from the experience of being taught to read in the first grade.

The study looks at the impact of teachers' actions on the meanings that accompany and are transmitted through reading instruction. It is based on a series of classroom observations and interviews with ten children and their teachers over a ten month period in two first grade classrooms of one public elementary school.

Noting the connection between conceptions of literacy, the practice of reading instruction and the prevailing mode of social science, I accept a view of literacy which grows out of a Critical social science perspective. This perspective takes the position that there is a direct connection between theory and practice and that individuals are potentially active agents. Critical literacy includes the process of relating what is read to personal experience, of questioning and critique as well as decoding and understanding the content of printed text.

I compare the teachers' dominant and exceptional patterns of resolution to classroom issues using the dilemmas of schooling language, a descriptive and analytic tool based on a "Critical Behaviorist" position (Berlak and Berlak, 1981).

Although at first the settings appear nearly identical, strong differences surface. The teachers' actions establish two distinct views of reading. Before school begins all the children describe reading as something useful and meaningful which they are willing and eager to do. Afterwards, more than half of the children are unwilling to read, in or out of school, unless required. They distinguish between "reading" and "reading at school" as they take on the teacher's view of reading.

While all the children report that reading is a teacher-determined task, in one classroom it is to be completed within a given period and requires remembering details in order to answer the teacher's questions. In the other, it is done to understand and share how the meaning of what is read relates to personal experience.